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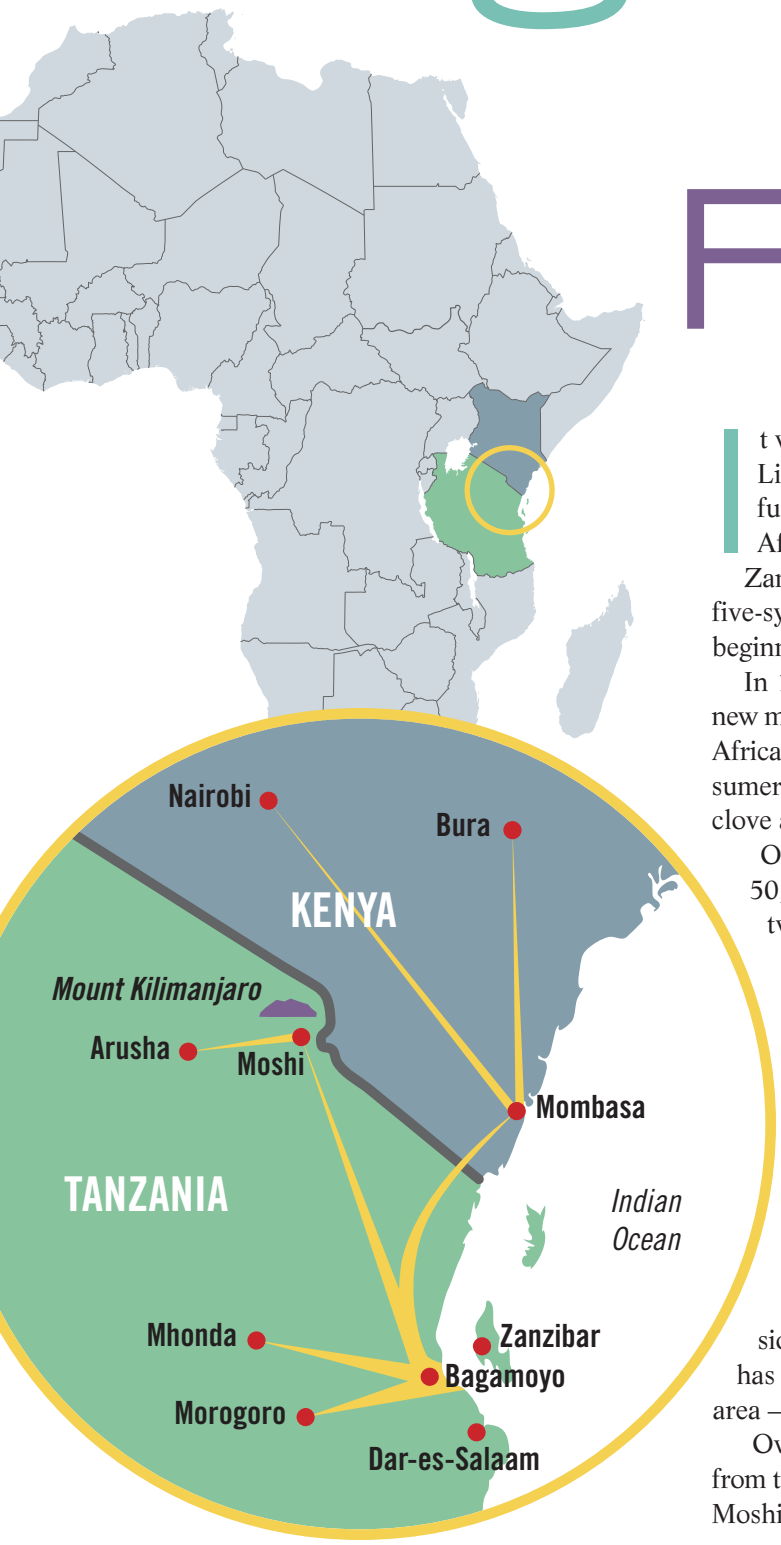
Tanzania

Bagamoyo
The Freedom



It was early years for the renewed Spiritan Congregation. Francis Libermann's group had given them a badly-needed blood transfusion. Back on their feet, they heard Africa calling — well, East Africa anyway.

Zanzibar – Bagamoyo – Dar es Salaam – Kilimanjaro … three- and five-syllable place names rolled trippingly off the tongues as the beginnings of Christianity in East Africa.

In 1862 the Spiritans chose the island of Zanzibar for their first new mission. It was populated by Swahili-speaking Arabs, Indians and Africans. A thriving hub of trade, it supplied slaves and spices to consumers across the Indian Ocean. The slaves were needed to work the clove and spice plantations of Arabia, Persia and Turkey.

On the mainland, opposite Zanzibar, was Bagamoyo. Over 50,000 human beings were sold each year in the markets of these two towns, twin centres of the greatest slave trade in the world at that time.

Bagamoyo was an old Arab town in black Africa just north of Dar es Salaam. Here, in 1866, the Spiritans built their Freedom Village, to protect and educate the slaves they had bought in the local markets. In a short time, it had a staff of twenty-five missionaries.

Today a beautiful cross of polished stone on the beach marks the spot where the first Spiritan missionaries stepped ashore. Inscribed on the cross are the words "Mungu Aneemeshe Afrika", "May God Bless Africa".

Today a long avenue of mango trees planted by the first missionaries leads into the heart of the Freedom Village. The mission has become a centre of hope and education for the people of the area — a role it played in the 19th century for the victims of slavery.

Over the following century the Spiritans moved west and north from this lslamic town to establish the thriving churches of Morogoro, Moshi, Nairobi and Mombasa. East Africa was calling. ■

Village

Statues made by artisans in Bagamoyo represent the slave trade.

Getting started in the highlands

Matthew Bender

It was near the end of August 1890. Six weeks earlier three Spiritans had set out from Bagamoyo on the coast of the Indian Ocean to venture into the interior of Tanzania. Their destination was Kilimanjaro and its snow-wrapped peak.

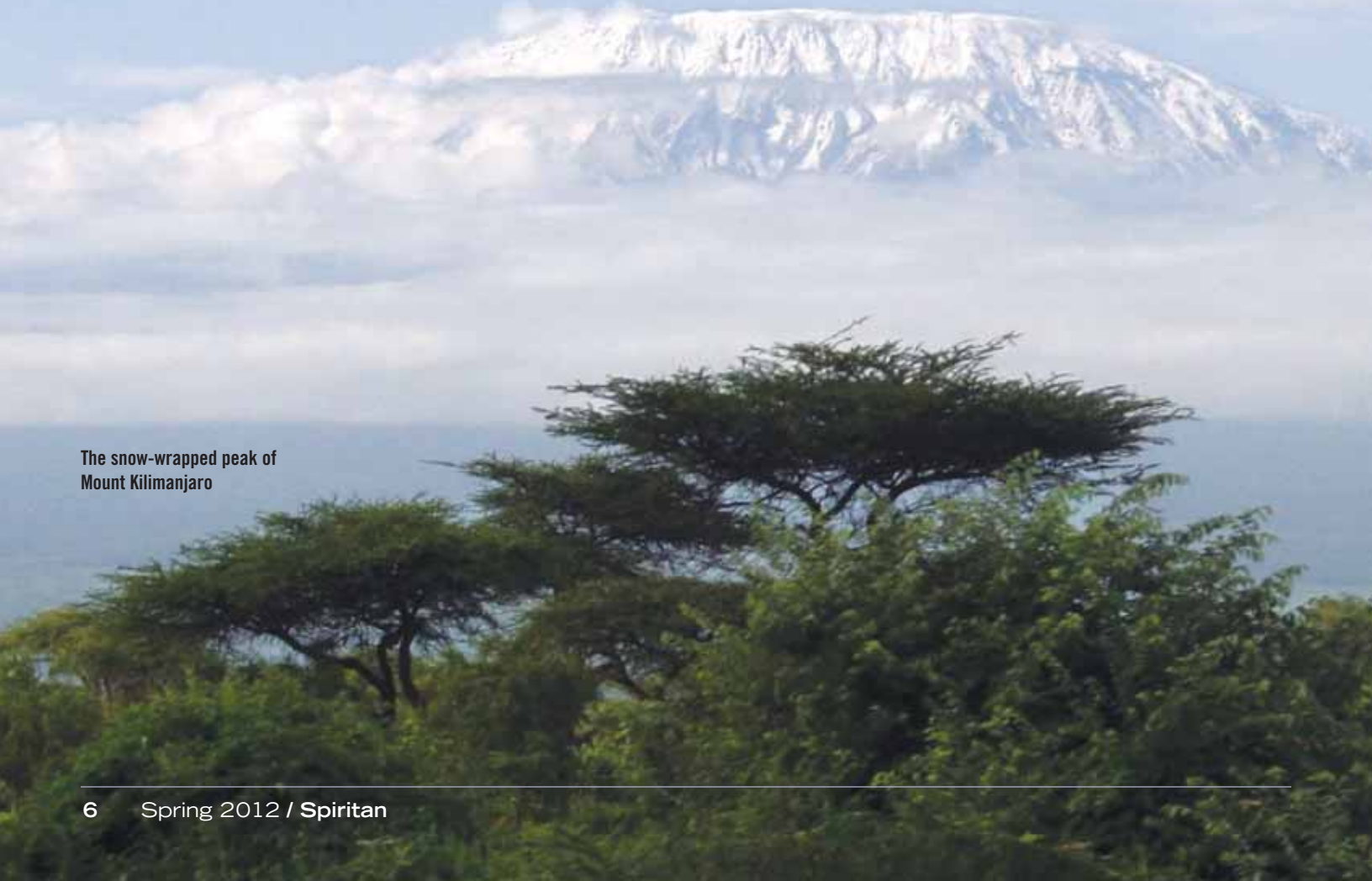
Over the next sixty years they and their successor Spiritans established one of the largest Christian communities on the slopes of this famous mountain: churches, schools, hospitals and dispensaries attended to the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the Chagga-speaking people. They transformed the missions from a foreign presence into a focal point of life.

Mount Kilimanjaro is Africa's tallest peak — 19,343 feet high, in the north east of Tanzania, only 200 miles south of the Equator. Because of its height Kilimanjaro has many climate zones offering glaciers and alpine desert at the top and fertile fields on the lower slopes.

For approximately 1,000 years the Chagga people have developed a thriving agricultural society based on the production of bananas, yams, millet and various vegetables. A system of irrigation canals carried water from deep river valleys to the ridges where the people benefited from three growing seasons per year and an easily accessible source of water for washing and cooking.

Kilimanjaro was a stopping point for many of the slave caravans running between the great lakes region and the coast. It opened further opportunities for the Spiritans to continue their mission of serving slave and ex-slave populations.

It was also a symbolic location — the continent's tallest peak had taken on an almost mystical significance.



The snow-wrapped peak of Mount Kilimanjaro

The first Spiritans chose Kilema on the southeast of the mountain as their "outpost." They obtained nearly 1000 acres of prime land on the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro and set about developing a Christian village. Within two years they had completed a temporary chapel, six additional buildings, as well as a furrow to bring water to the mission. By 1910 a permanent church was in place.

Using the land they had been given, these early Spiritans created gardens for food and crops for sale. The missionaries, lay catechists and those living in the village had their own source of food. They also generated much-needed revenue, provided employment for those living in the mission and for the people that lived nearby.

Perhaps the most important crop introduced by the missionaries was coffee. In 1902 the Spiritans brought several small Arabica trees from Reunion. They thrived in the well-watered, high altitude of Kilimanjaro. In a few years the mission had a large garden of trees producing lucrative coffee beans for export.

Missionary beginnings

The first Spiritans established a Christian village as a strong religious community. With its education and outreach they hoped to attract surrounding peoples. But its population grew slowly — 100 people in five years.

They set up schools for children and adults, teaching basic Christian knowledge, arithmetic, reading and writing. Swahili was the common language. Gradually schooling became more structured and formal. Schoolhouses were built, trained teachers were hired and the curriculum expanded to include science, domestic arts, agriculture, health, and other languages. In 1934, the 214 primary schools run by the Spiritans had 14,740 enrolled students.

The celebration of Mass featured a high-energy atmosphere and lots of music. Initially all Masses were in Latin and the local people took readily to the Latin hymns. Over time the priests allowed the use of vernacular language and music.

German colonial rule was established in the 1890s. But after the First World War the colony shifted into British hands and became known as the Tanganyika Territory.

Slow start — explosive growth

The people of Kilimanjaro initially greeted the Spiritan missions with a great deal of skepticism. Few sought membership in the churches or conversion to the Catholic Church. Those who did tended to be either social outcasts or freed slaves, well outside mainstream Chagga society.

Fishing boats on the shores of Bagamoyo.

In the 1930s however, the Catholic missions began to experience explosive growth: 1933 – 29,000 baptized; 1953 – 92,500; 1961 – 175,300. By the mid-1960s Kilimanjaro had become a predominantly Catholic/Lutheran place, with an estimated Christian population of 80%-90%.

By 1956 more than 90% of Chagga children were in Church-run primary schools.

For those who completed secondary school, several options awaited e.g. enrollment in teacher-training colleges and higher education opportunities away from the mountain.

Local people in control

In the early years of the mission, the priests and brothers relied heavily on catechists — at first immigrants from Bagamoyo and the coastal areas, and later Chagga converts — to carry out the bulk of missionary work

The first Chagga priest was ordained in 1939. The mission stations gradually became parishes, their control shifting into the hands of local clergy. In 1960 Bishop Joseph Byrne, first Irish bishop of Moshi, was succeeded by Bishop Joseph Kilasara, the mountain's first African bishop.

What made the Spiritan missions successful?

There were several structural similarities between existing Chagga beliefs and Catholicism:

If only…

Joe Herzstein CSSp

Africa is important to Spiritans. We began with Africa. Part of our charism is to be African … I pushed to come to Arusha — and they put me teaching in a seminary for five years. But after I escaped I joined Vince Donovan, Ned Marchessault, Mort Kane and Vince Stegman to work among the Maasai. We followed the cattle markets, talked to the men, and little by little made connections. Gradually our reputation as spiritual leaders grew.

The bishops don't want to change things very much. They want to follow what's already in place, the Roman way of being church. If only they would really let the people bring their way of life with them; if only they would see that it's not really against the gospel. God is so important in the lives of the Maasai.

If the specifically western things in the church change, then a great deal can happen. If not, the African church could turn into the same thing as the European or American church. We are where you were in 1940-50: the church here could go either way.

Here there's a vision — a vision of building the church, of seeing the people develop in new ways. Being part of this young alive Province keeps us old people from dying out.

a) Belief in a supreme God. The peoples of Kilimanjaro believed in a single divine being, Ruwa, who had created the world and continued to influence its daily affairs. He ruled from the top of Mount Kilimanjaro and had given the rich resources of the mountain as a special gift to his chosen people. They also believed that the spirits of their ancestors lived on as intermediaries between them and Ruwa.

Spiritans adopted the word "Ruwa" as their word for God. This was enormously effective in making Christian faith comprehensible for people — though it risked Ruwa and God becoming thought of as the same being

b) The Chagga believed that the spirits of the deceased, especially those who had been particularly prominent, continued to reside in the land of the living and had power to influence daily events. Thus they bore some similarity to the Communion of Saints. The Spiritan missionaries explained the

"Africans were seen as an empty tin: you had to pour in water to fill it … not true. Africans knew God before any missionaries came."

— Bishop Augustine Shao, Zanzibar

saints as analogous to, yet distinct from, these spirits. Devotional practices such as reciting prayers, saying the rosary, and lighting votive candles became acceptable means of worship.

c) Several important symbols in Chagga spirituality had counterparts in Catholicism. Perhaps the best example is water. The Chagga considered water to be a gift from Ruwa. It had the power not only to enable life in an otherwise desolate landscape, but also to purify and cleanse the individual. While Christians used the rite of Baptism to cleanse believers of original sin, Chagga elders used rites of washing as part of initiation rituals. Water imagery created a bridge between their existing religious beliefs and Catholic ones. The fact that many Catholic practices could substitute for existing ones e.g. baptism for initiation, enhanced the social acceptability of conversion.

Economic factors were also crucial to the rising prominence of the missions. Arabica coffee emerged as the real engine in this transition. Crop yields improved as clergy adopted from local farmers the practice of intercropping coffee with bananas, thus allowing the coffee trees to be shielded from direct sunlight

By bringing coffee cultivation to the mountain's population, the Catholic missions introduced a revenue source that transformed many aspects of life on the mountain. Coffee money funded the construction of schools, churches, books and

better quality construction materials. It brought men directly into agriculture, an activity that had largely been the place of women.

Missionary strategy

The Spiritans initially designed a missionary strategy based on Christian villages, in hope that these communities would become examples of good Christian living. By the 1930s mission schools on Kilimanjaro had educated thousands of people, providing them with access to new knowledge and new employment opportunities. Large numbers of students became Christians, maintained membership in their local churches and remained connected through everyday life. They found themselves much more comfortable with one another than with those who had not attended school or were not Christians.

The missions came to represent as new means of social advancement. Many young people found they could achieve status by becoming highly successful farmers, by seeking employment through the colonial government or private sector, or, for the select few, by attending university.

Tension between them and the old elites grew in the 1950s. The British colonial administration called for the creation of a paramount chieftaincy — in essence a single chief for all of Kilimanjaro.

Conclusion

In a period of sixty years (1890s-1950s) Catholicism rose from being a faith of freed slaves and outsiders to being the dominant faith of the mountain. Along with their Lutheran counterparts, the Spiritans managed to transform the mountain into an almost wholly Christian place.

Locally grown coffee — a source of prosperity.

Missions became social centres that displaced existing social organizations and laid the foundation for the spread of formal education, making Kilimanjaro into one of the most highly educated parts of Tanzania. Coffee fuelled economic growth in the region, facilitating not only a rise in family incomes but also the further spread of missions, schools, technical training centres, hospitals, dispensaries and roads. The mountain became a fundamentally different place in a very short period of time.

Today the Catholic Church on Mount Kilimanjaro remains vibrant. It covers over 60% of the whole population.

Though religious life is strong — with churches packed for each of the Sunday Masses — hardships such as HIV/AIDS and low coffee prices are taking their toll, threatening the communities themselves and the work of the missions.

In spite of these problems, a sense of tremendous pride, faithfulness and optimism pervades the mountain. ■

Adapted with permission from *Spiritan Horizons*, Duquesne University.

The risen Christ

Vincent Donovan CSSp

Just look at the difference on Easter Sunday morning.

He was a Jew before that, knowing only the Jewish culture. He didn't think that knowing all the cultures of the world like God knew them was something to cling to. He knew his own.

On Easter Sunday his Jewish friends didn't want to let him go, they wanted to hang on to him.

But he was no longer just a Jew. He was no longer just a male. What good would that be to half the human race? He was a universal human being, a complete human being.

Like Mary Magdalene we too want to hold on to him, but we must let him rise from the dead. We must let him go to the Father so he can send out his spirit on all humankind, not just us.

Jesus of Nazareth wasn't black. He wasn't white either. He was Jewish, a Middle East man, probably brown, in-between.

But there is a black Christ. There has to be. There's an Indian Christ, a European Christ, an Irish Christ and an American Christ. Helping him become these Christs is our missionary work.

Read again the Easter stories: a friendly hello to women in the garden on Sunday morning, a love scene with Mary Magdalene, a walk down a country road on Sunday afternoon with some friends, diner at a village inn, cooking breakfast by the lake one morning. When we get discouraged we should read these stories over again — that's what it's coming to, that's what we bet our lives on, our eternal lives: the risen Christ.

A group of people gathered around an empty tomb on a Sunday morning and a community coalesced. It grew and spread across the world like a mustard seed. Some Roman historians got it right; "This Christ is all over the world."

Vincent Donovan CSSp, Spiritan Retreat 1999, Mississauga, Ontario.

Flying medical service

Pat Patten CSSp

Lakaashu died.

This is not an easy story … but a story worth telling. It's a story that spans four months and speaks to the hope, effort and time spent trying to save a seven-year-old boy's life. It's also a story that Flying Medical Service (FMS) believes provided a quality of life Lakashu otherwise would not have had.

FMS is a team. Lakashu's story cannot be told without including those who identified a need, found medical support and assisted in other ways.

Ben, an FMS pilot, first saw Lakashu at a remote clinic in northwestern Tanzania. Though not able to identify the problem, Ben knew this little boy needed help.

FMS first flew Lakashu to a local hospital. Two weeks later, during the next clinic, it was clear he was not improving. Ben contacted Pat, Flying Medical Service's director, who discussed the case with medical people in Arusha. The first step was to ensure that Lakashu would receive an accurate diagnosis and medical treatment not available in the remote area where he and his family lived.

Immediately upon landing in Arusha, the medical team waiting for him quickly suspected Burkitt's Lymphoma. John and Joyce de Gooijer, VICS volunteers with FMS, drove Lakashu and his uncle Sammy to hospital two hours away.

Lakashu had never been away from his home or family. His

"I came to be surprised"

It was early evening. I had been flying all day. The high mountains of southern Congo reflected in the warm clear waters of Lake Tanganyika. The spectacular beauty hid the fighting still going on over gold, diamonds, coltan and other minerals. I banked the plane into a tight turn, keeping the tiny, rarely used airstrip in view over my shoulder. It looked landable. It was. But the car I expected to meet me was nowhere in sight.

As the plane came to a stop, two dozen young children in dusty and very basic clothes came running over to see me. I opened the door. They were cautious but curious. I spoke with them and joked with them, asking if they were the night watchmen. They laughed and said no. I asked the older one,

life was turned upside down and within a few weeks he experienced several hospitals, a plane ride, driving through the city and being seen by many medical specialists. His teeth had fallen out, it appeared as though he was blind in one eye and due to a swollen tongue, he had not eaten for three days. A Maasai cloth covering his severely deformed face hid him from questioning stares. This seven-year-old boy had tears running down his face as he cried for his mother and his home.

Within days of starting treatments, he was once again able to swallow. He was asking for his mother, so TJ, another FMS pilot, flew her from her remote home to Arusha, then drove her to the hospital where she rejoined her son. FMS financially supported Lakashu's medical, food and clothing needs. Hospital staff knew that he was not responding well, but did not have the necessary medications to continue his treatment.

Through contacts wih a number of medical people, Pat became aware of a hospital specializing in Burkitt's Lymphoma. Joyce picked up Lakashu and his mother from the hospital, brought them to the FMS compound, and TJ flew them to the hospital. The fear of flying Lakashu had experienced on his first trip was replaced by a huge smile as he looked out the plane window. Theirs was a flight of hope — a belief that the medical treatment would be successful and Lakashu would once again be home with his family.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. Lakashu died soon after starting his new treatments. FMS flew his mother home to be with her family.

Without treatment Lakashu would have starved to death. He died with his mother at his side. His life ended with dignity.

Sometimes that is what success is all about … sometimes that is what resurrection is all about. ■

who wouldn't have been more than 10, why he had come to the airstrip. "I came to be surprised," he said with a huge smile and wide opened eyes. I asked him, "Are you surprised?" He answered, "I'm amazed."

They asked when I was leaving. I told them it would be very early in the morning, with some doctors who had been working in their area. They asked if they could come to watch. I told them to be here before sunrise. They were. As the wheels lifted off the bumpy earth, the kids waved. I rocked the plane's wings and banked into the dawn-thin line of light on the eastern horizon.

I don't know if I'll ever see them again. Still, as the year comes to an end with the promise of a new one to come, I know I will remember the child's lesson.

What a great way to live. What a neat thing to do: to come to be surprised. ■

— Pat Patten CSSp

Tanzania

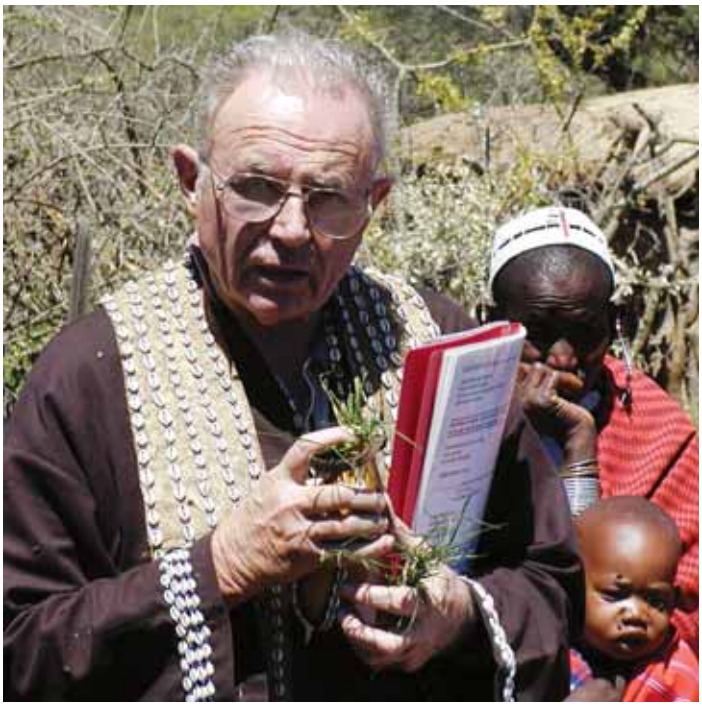
Olbalbal diary

Ned Marchessault CSSp

Two boys, one pair of shoes

Kangai and Lemayani came to me at Endulen. They were unique in that each had one leg — Kangai the right and Lemanyi the left leg. They came to me at about the age of six or seven right from Endulen Hospital, where they had their legs amputated.

A cow had fallen on Kangai, broken his leg and caused a gaping wound that was not treated. The family was very poor and, not having the resources to pay hospital expenses, hoped it would heal itself after they applied the traditional remedy of plastering cow dung on the open sore. Instead of healing, gangrene set in. Finally, when he was running a high fever and in danger of dying, they took him to the hospital. The doctor saved Kagai's life, but not his leg.



Ned Marchessault CSSp holds a clump of grass as he leads Mass. For the Maasai, grass and life are synonymous.

Lemayani had fallen from a tree and got poked in the leg by a sharp stick. The wound festered and when the leg turned black they took him to the hospital. The doctor saved Lemayani's life too, but not his leg.

Kangai is the athlete of the two. He plays football using his stick as a second leg. In fact, having one leg does not slow him down at all. He is one of our best footballers and much sought after when players are chosen for teams. Lamayani is the intellectual one and has done very well in his studies. They have both gradated secondary school now and are looking to continue their education.

Over the years I've saved a considerable amount of money on socks and shoes for the boys. Since they take the same size, one pair of socks and a single pair of shoes does for both!

What some will do to please a cow

This morning, traveling down Mount Kilimanjaro heading back to Maasai country, we passed numerous women making their daily ten-fifteen mile trek down the mountain. They told me they were on their way to cut grass for the family cows — there was no more grazing land left on Mount Kilimanjaro, not an inch. They have found a unique solution — but one that is very hard on the women.

Over the last fifty years the Chagga people have become so numerous, and their land divided and re-divided among their children and children's children so often, that there is no land for further farming, not even a square foot for cattle to graze.

A household may have a cow or two, but these are kept in a shed next to the Chagga's home. Each morning, the woman of the house or an older daughter, never a man, must go down to the grassland many miles distant to cut fodder for the family cow. Sometimes, if finances allow, she will buy a bundle of grass. Some people make their living cutting and selling these bundles to women from the mountainside. Then, usually in the late afternoon, the women will climb the ten or

fifteen miles back to the mountain homestead — carrying the thirty-forty pound bundle of grass on their heads.

As someone who lives in the savanna, where grass is usually so plentiful, it blows my mind to try and take in what these women go through to obtain two or three days' fodder for a cow.

Heart-breaking hopes

Many Maasai girls come to ask for help with secondary school fees. Their mothers usually come with them. It is heart-breaking to see the happiness in the eyes of the mothers when their daughters are "chosen" by the government to continue their studies in high school. The parents have high hopes that education will enable their child to find a good job later on and help the family to have a better life. In most cases it is a forlorn hope. The schools are hopelessly poor. There are few books — and few teachers often reluctant to live and teach in the bush.

Unless the child is exceptionally bright and takes advantage of every tidbit of available resources, he or she will leave four years of secondary school with nothing.

I help each family that comes to me — at least a little. I do so for the sake of showing solidarity with the parents, knowing that, in most cases, it is a useless gesture. I prefer to look after one or two primary school graduates each year that are clever and have done really well in school. I send them to a good school that has books, good teachers and other resources. In this way, I hope that the funds people entrust to me for the education of the Maasai girls will have some positive impact, both for the individual student and for the Maasai.

Moved in

Just moved in to my new place in Olbalbal. Twenty seven Maasai elders, warriors and women welcomed me with tea, helped me move my stuff in, scrubbed the two rooms, and sat with me most of the afternoon. They also found a mosquito net

for me and helped me put it up. We are in the midst of the rains here and there is plenty of water around and so — mosquitoes. They also cleared lots of rocks from around the house and now I can park close to the door. They are so friendly and welcoming that it is embarrassing. I am determined to live up to the warmth of their greeting.

Small boy lost and alone

At dawn this morning the cries of the women could be heard lamenting the loss of a six-year-old herdsboy taken and eaten by a leopard during the night.

At various times during the year warriors take the bulk of the cattle to better grazing places. Here at Olbalbal, while there is still plenty of standing water, the rains have slackened and the grass is short. Nearby villages have joined together in sending cattle off with a band of warriors. They drive the cattle some twenty miles distant to take advantage of good grazing ground. As is normal, the young men took some small children with them to herd the calves near their temporary makeshift *boma*.

Yesterday evening, on the return of the calves to the encampment, one small boy was missing. The warriors lost no time backtracking the herd of calves and then following the meandering tracks of the lost boy. They found what was left of him in the branches of an acacia tree. Separated from his companions and the calves, lost and alone, he was easy prey for the leopard.

The memory lingers on

*From **Spiritan**, August 1996.*

In Endulen near the Kenya/Tanzania border, Ned Marchessault is convinced that, if the Maasai are to survive as a people, their greatest need is the education of leaders who can take them into the next millennium.

"The Maasai are on the road to extinction," he asserts. "Articulate leadership holds out their only chance of survival. They lack knowledge of their rights and lack the skills to fight for them ... they have become objects of exploitation."

He was sitting under a spreading acacia tree in the dark of the African night. His students were gathered around barbecuing pieces of meat from a goat that had been strangled, skinned and butchered moments before to celebrate the arrival of visitors from Canada. Educating these boys and girls is Ned's highest priority. The goat and lap-top side by side symbolize the chasm these young people have to bridge if they are to survive as a people.

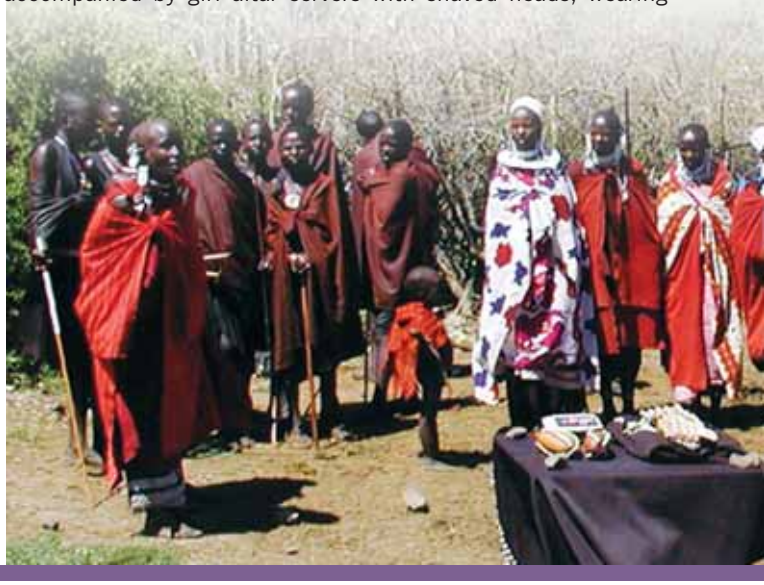
"The Maasai are a proud people" says Ned. "They hold tenaciously to their traditions, they feel good about their life and ways, they would rather be marginalized than absorbed, they have implicitly made the decision to survive as a people or not at all. The key to their taking charge of their destiny is education. Bringing them the good news the includes helping the neglected and down-trodden gain self-respect, economic security and social awareness.

Picking my way across the meadow-land, I round the comer of the church with its corrugated roof. The bell ringer continues his call to worship.

Ned Marchessault has spent 26 years among the Maasai. Today, hammer in hand, he rhythmically strikes a tire rim suspended from an iron tie rod. From nearby bomas the Christians of the area converge — the elders with staffs, the warriors with spears, the older women with watchful eyes, the teenage mothers with babies on their backs, the children in tittering groups pointing to the foreigners who have come with Ned to this Wednesday Mass. Wednesday, Sunday ... in Maasailand the Sabbath is a moveable day.

We had come to the hilltop settlement of Longo Juu in two four-wheel trucks across the tracks in the grass. These Maasai people first heard of Christianity eight years ago when an elder invited Ned to tell his people about Jesus. In 1992 the first Christians among them were baptized. Now around a portable altar with black altar cloths, led by a priest in a black vestment — the colour of joy for the Maasai — they were ready for Eucharist.

We stand on the flattened tan grass under the corrugated roof. The choir had been rehearsing before our arrival. Their antiphonal singing encourages all of us to join in. The litany-style chants draw enthusiastic response. Ned comes through the congregation accompanied by girl altar servers with shaved heads, wearing



I went with two elders and five women to visit his family at their village some five miles from the mission. Since the mother of the dead child is a Christian, we started our visit with some traditional Maasai prayers. I took my turn in reading. Then with water and a little milk we blessed the parents' house, all the houses in the *bema* and the cattle enclosure. After the prayers and blessings, I read the account of the raising of Lazarus from John's gospel.

Then everyone gathered under a shade tree for gourds of fresh milk, heavily sweetened tea, and corn porridge. Now was the time when each visitor would have the opportunity to say a word or two to the parents of the dead child. The words of people untouched by Christianity were in stark contrast to those of the Christians.

Those working out of pure tradition said that we needed to get by what happened, forget this terrible thing and take care of the living children. If we get bogged down in grief it will be harmful to our families and villages.

The Christians were very tentative talking about life after death. They said things like: "The bible tells us that Jesus raised Lazarus after a number of days in the grave. Jesus promised life without end to those who follow him." They were very cautious and were not making any definitive statements about life after death. But I was encouraged by their words, and felt that they were a reflection of their young Christianity.

What the Maasai understand about death and so many other things comes from their experience of these things over many hundreds of years. I think that when we present them with a faith that sometimes contradicts their long-held traditions, we need to do so with great care and deep respect. Their understanding of the world, and the ways they've worked out for surviving in it, have stood them well up to now.

special robes, ornate bead headbands, earrings and collars. The elders lead the opening prayers and the people respond with enthusiasm

"Na'ai" — "Yes, Amen." The catechist proclaims the first reading. Holding a clump of grass, Ned tells the gospel story of Lazarus. Grass was also placed on the altar. For a nomadic people living off their cattle, grass and life are synonymous.

All who wish to receive the blessing of the sick come forward. The celebrant, the catechist and a young woman leader bless them individually with Mafuta (oil of the sick) and milk.

Before Mass ends the white Canadians are officially welcomed and given beaded gifts — a necklace cross and a bracelet. Then all of us move outside and form a circle for the final blessing.

It seems right and just that our departing Land Rovers carry more passengers than when they arrived — in a back seat built for two we make room for five, one a severely ill woman whom we drive to hospital in Ngorongoro. In a small way we return the hospitality we have celebrated.

Oloicura's dilemma

Oloicura watches my place when I am out in the villages and when I go overnight to the main mission on the crater rim. Yesterday he came with a big problem. He needs to get his wife and three children back.

Years ago, Oloicura went to the village of a local elder and undertook to herd his cattle for about ten years. The elder, on his side, agreed to give Oloicura his daughter in marriage. This is a common way for a Maasai man to marry if he doesn't have cattle to give his prospective father-in-law. Oloicura shepherded the old man's herd for some years and then was given one of the family's daughters for his wife. Three children came along and everything was going well. Then things went very bad very fast.

Oloicura got into an argument with his mother-in-law.

The disagreement escalated to name-calling, some very serious accusations and nasty language. The mother-in-law, in a fit of rage, went to her husband and demanded that he take his daughter back, together with the children, and chase Oloicura away. To maintain peace in the family, her husband agreed to do as his wife wanted.

Now Oloicura wants me to go with him to ask forgiveness and get his family back. He figures that my position as the padre here in Olbalbal might prompt his mother-in-law to accept his apologies.

Another bizarre factor in the mix is that both he and his mother-in-law are members of the small group of fifteen that lead the singing in our Christian community. I've asked around and a couple of the leading elders of the area tell me that there is no way that Oloicura's mother-in-law is going to relent. Her feelings run too deep. What does an 'outsider' do? ■